Tribes and Environment in Chotanagpur :A Historical Study (1900 to 1990 AD)

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1. Status of subject matter

1.1 Introduction

Tribal communities around the world have historically maintained a unique relationship with their environments, often embodying sustainable practices that contribute to biodiversity conservation. The Indian subcontinent bears witness to a tapestry woven with the threads of indigenous tribes, environmental diversity, and the enduring legacy of British colonial rule. Indigenous tribes, with their rich cultural tapestries, have long been custodians of diverse ecosystems, intricately linked to their traditional practices and beliefs. However, the imprint of British colonialism, marked by policies that reshaped land use and resource distribution, left an indelible mark on both tribal communities and the environment they inhabit.

Chotanagpur, characterized by undulating hills, dense forests, and fertile plateaus, has been the ancestral homeland of myriad tribal groups, each with its distinct cultural tapestry. These communities, including the Santhal, Munda, Oraon, and others, have traditionally led lives intricately entwined with the land, relying on agriculture, forestry, and traditional practices for sustenance.

The 20th century, however, brought winds of change that would echo through the hills and valleys of Chotanagpur. As Colonial incursions cast shadows on the traditional ways of life, challenging the delicate equilibrium that had sustained the tribes and their environment for centuries.

1.2 The Review of Literature:

A brief review of the literature studied is as follows:

Guha, Ramchandra,1983, Forestry in British and Post-British India- A Historical Analysis

Through this article, Guha suggests that regardless of the colonial or post-colonial context, forest policies in India have consistently marginalized forest communities and compromised their livelihoods in favor of serving the interests of external powers or industrialists.

Damodaran, Vinita,2006, Colonial constructions of the tribe in India: the case of Chotanagpur

In his article, the author looks at the multiple strands of the British policy towards tribes in eastern India. Colonial administration did participate and engage with land and people and were forced to contend with indigenous knowledge and ideas of place. Author also analyses colonial and post-colonial policies and concentrates on the historical process whereby the traditionally held rights of the forest communities have been progressively curtailed through the development of forest policy, management, and legislation.

Sivaramakrishnan, K.2009, Forests and environmental history of modern India In his essay, he tries to show how the definition and management of boundaries between wildness and civility in Indian Society and the relation of ideas of nature to different aspects of social life-labor, aesthetics, politics, commerce, or agriculture- are interconnected in the historical process that informs environmental history.

Saravanan, V., 2018, Environmental History and Tribals in Modern India

In his book, he examines the environmental history of South India from the late eighteenth century to the early twenty-first centuries, through both colonial and post- colonial periods. He also writes about how colonial policy impacted the Indian environment during the pre-forestry Act era.

Bandyopadhyay, M., 1999, Demographic consequences of non-tribal incursion in Chotanagpur region during colonial period(1850-1950)

This paper examines non-tribal encroachment in Chotanagpur during colonial era (1850-1950), impacting tribal life. Colonization led to integration into British economy, urbanization, and industrialization, causing tribal deforestation, land loss, unemployment, and migration, altering demographics.

Chaudhuri, S.N., 2000, Tribal Religion: Religious Beliefs and Practices Among the Santals of Chotanagpur

This book explores the religious beliefs, rituals, and practices of the Santal tribe in Chotanagpur, offering insights into their spiritual worldview and cultural heritage.

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1.3 Literature Gap

A noticeable literature gap exists in the examination of the nuanced ways in which socio-economic and political changes during the 20th century have influenced the traditional ecological knowledge and sustainable practices of tribal communities in the Chotanagpur region. While existing studies often touch upon the broader impacts of colonialism, independence, and modernization on tribal livelihoods and the environment, there is a dearth of in-depth analysis that dissects the specific mechanisms through which these historical forces shaped local ecological practices. Furthermore, there is a limited exploration of how tribal communities actively engaged in conservation efforts and adapted their practices in response to environmental changes during this period. Bridging this gap is crucial for a more comprehensive understanding of the intricate dynamics between tribal communities and their environment, providing insights that can inform contemporary environmental policies and sustainable development initiatives in the region.

2. Statement of the Problem:

As the 20th century unfolded, a noticeable transformation occurred in the relationship between tribal communities and their natural surroundings. The harmonious coexistence that characterized their historical connection with the environment started to give way to growing conflicts. These conflicts arise due to external interventions of the British resulting in the exploitation of resources, and changing agricultural practices further poses significant challenges to the sustainability of both the tribes and their ecosystems.

3. Objectives

The research aims to achieve the following specific objectives:

- ✓ To examine the historical trajectory of tribal communities in the Chotanagpur region.
- ✓ To assess the demographic, topography and cultural transformations of tribal communities in the Chotanagpur.
- ✓ To analyze the influence of colonialism on tribal communities, exploring how colonialism shaped their relationship with the environment.
- ✓ To investigate the emergence and evolution of conflicts between tribal communities and their environment due to external factor.
- ✓ To elucidate the key events of environmental conflicts in Chotanagpur.
- ✓ To explore the shifting perspectives and approaches towards tribal rights, environmental conservation, and sustainable development in Chotanagpur region.

4. Research Hypotheses

- ✓ The historical trajectory of tribal communities in the Chotanagpur region.
- ✓ There was a demographic, topography and cultural transformation in Chotanagpur.
- ✓ There was a significant impact of colonialism on tribal communities and their relationship with the environment.
- ✓ There was emergence and evolution of conflicts between tribal communities and their environment due to external factor.
- ✓ There was some key events of environmental conflict in Chotanagpur
- ✓ There was possibilities of reestablishing the peaceful coexistence of tribal with the environment.

5. Research Design

5.1. Research Methodology

This historical study employ interdisciplinary and mixed-methods research approach to investigate the growing conflicts between tribal communities and their environment in the Chotanagpur region during the 20th century. Utilizing a historical research design, the study integrates data from diverse sources. A comprehensive literature review, spanning academic works, historical documents, and archival materials, forms the foundation for contextualizing the historical trajectory. Archival research involves accessing governmental and non-governmental archives to gather primary sources, while oral history interviews with tribal community members and local experts provide crucial firsthand insights. Employing purposive and expert sampling ensures a representative selection of communities and knowledgeable participants. Data analysis involves a comparative examination of historical trends and thematic coding to identify patterns in the interplay between tribal practices, external influences, and environmental changes. Ethical considerations encompass obtaining informed consent, maintaining confidentiality, and demonstrating cultural sensitivity.

5.2 Tools and Techniques for data collection

Historical research often involves a variety of tools to gather, analyze, and interpret information. Some key tools include:

- **Digitized Collections:** Many historical documents are now available online, making digitized collections valuable for remote access.
- **Historical Maps:** Maps will help us to visualize geographical changes over time and understand the context of historical events.
- **Oral Histories:** By Interviewing individuals who lived through certain events we can get unique perspectives and insights not found in written records.
- **Chronologies:** By creating timelines to organize events chronologically and identify patterns or trends.
- **Digital Tools:** software will be used for data analysis, visualization, and historical mapping to enhance research capabilities.
- **Questionnaire:** Open ended questionnaire will be used for interview.

5.3 Analysis of fact/ data

In historical research, the analysis of data and facts is crucial for constructing accurate and meaningful narratives. Following approach will be used:

- **Source Evaluation:** To assess the reliability, bias, and context of primary and secondary sources. The author's perspective, purpose, and potential limitations will be considered.
- **Cross-Verification:** Information from multiple sources will be compared to identify commonalities and discrepancies. Consistency across different accounts enhances the credibility of the data.
- **Contextualization:** To Understand the historical context surrounding the data. We will analyze the political, social, economic, and cultural factors that may have influenced events or perspectives.

- **Critical Thinking:** critical thinking skills will be applied to interpret data objectively. Question assumptions, challenge interpretations, and recognize the complexity of historical narratives.
- **Synthesis:** We will integrate various pieces of evidence into a cohesive narrative to Present a nuanced understanding of the past by combining different perspectives and types of data.

6. Relevance of study

This study seeks to untangle the historical threads of this intricate relationship, delving into the root causes of the growing conflicts between tribes and the environment in Chotanagpur.
Beyond the academic pursuit, the significance of this research lies in its potential to inform contemporary policies and practices that strive for a balance between economic development and environmental conservation. By understanding the historical nuances of these conflicts, we can pave the way for solutions that not only address immediate challenges but also honor the cultural heritage of the tribes.

7. Need and utility of topic in current scenario

Understanding the roots of these conflicts is crucial for informed decision-making and sustainable development practices. The insights gleaned from this research can inform policymakers in crafting targeted and context-specific interventions, ensuring the preservation of cultural heritage while fostering social harmony. In an era marked by heightened environmental consciousness and the imperative for inclusive development, this research offers a nuanced understanding that is essential for addressing contemporary challenges and fostering a balanced coexistence between tribal communities and their environment in the Chotanagpur region.

8. Contribution in current knowledge

The proposed historical analysis of growing conflicts between tribes and the environment in the Chotanagpur region during the 20th century holds significant potential for contributing to current knowledge. Existing literature has touched on various aspects of tribal life and environmental dynamics, yet a focused historical exploration of the conflicts remains limited. This research seeks to fill this gap by providing a comprehensive understanding of the historical evolution, factors, and patterns underlying the conflicts. Such a contribution is essential for researchers, policymakers, and practitioners seeking a deeper understanding of the historical context of tribal-environment interactions, enabling more informed and effective strategies for sustainable development and conflict resolution in the Chotanagpur region and beyond.

9. Future Work

Identifying potential avenues for further research, particularly in areas of conflict resolution andsustainable development in tribal regions.

10. PROPOSED CHAPTER SCHEME

Introduction

Chapter 1 : Historical Background

Chapter 2 : Environmental Context

Chapter 3 : Colonial Policies & Tribal Communities

Chapter 4 : Emerging Conflicts

Chapter 5 : Major Cases Of Conflicts

Chapter 6 : The Changing Perspectives

Conclusion

Bibliography

Appendix

This chapter scheme outlines the structure of the research. Each chapter contributes to building a comprehensive understanding of the historical dynamics between tribal communities and their environment in the Chotanagpur region.

References

Primary Data Sources

For a historical study on the growing conflict between tribes and their environment in the Chotanagpur region during the 20th century, various primary sources can be utilized to glean insights into the lived experiences and interactions of the tribal communities. These primary sources may include:

- Archival Records
- Local Government Records
- Oral Histories
- Community Artifacts and Artwork

- Photographs and Maps
- Personal Diaries and Letters
- Traditional Folklore and Songs
- Community Rituals and Ceremonies
- Legal Documents and Land Records
- Newspaper Articles and Publications

Secondary Data Sources

- Academic Journals
- Historical Databases
- Government Publications
- Anthropological Studies
- Legal Documents

Utilizing a combination of these secondary data sources will provide a comprehensive historical perspective on the conflicts between tribes and the environment in the Chotanagpur region during the twentieth century.

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